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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

November 12, 1998

Commissioner Susan Ness
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M St. N.W., Rm. 832
Washington, D.C. 20554

MM 93-2

Dear Commissioner:

I learned recently that you at the FCC are considering a change in the rules to give Direct Broadcast Satellite providers (i.e. community access TV channels) the ability to pick their own programmers to fulfill the public interest requirements of the federal law. I'm sure you're familiar with the most salient objection to this idea -- that the local cable access organizations may take the "easy way" out by allowing commercial broadcasters such as Discovery channel or TLC to fill this function and thereby excluding the public completely.

Frankly, I'm appalled that you'd even consider this course of action. What a chilling affect on the democratic process! Down here at the citizen level, I use community access TV in several ways:

1. To receive local information and programming I would not otherwise be able to get. I have a busy life and can't possibly attend every City Commission meeting, every County Commission meeting, every meeting of the School Board, and every faith-based event I am interested in. Nor, am I able to afford the time or the money to attend every symphony concert, every play, every arts exhibition, and every school program I would like to. Our local Community Access facility allows me to watch these events on TV at my leisure both because I can often see them live as I do my ironing or I can watch a re-broadcast at a time more convenient to me.
2. I use Community Access to get my own "message" across to the community. As a violence prevention specialist, I work with local government, agencies and not-for-profits, schools, courts, and law enforcement to create policies and programming to support healthy youth development. Community Access allows me and my colleagues to focus on specific issues and successes and to get that information to the public in a clear, rapid, and interesting way
3. As a community volunteer, I spend time with several organizations such as the League of Women Voters which have missions of citizen involvement. Through producing programming on Community Access we are able to engage a far broader audience than a simple candidates' forum or issues panel could.

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4. Community Access is recreation. I really enjoy being able to volunteer with projects created by other producers. These bring me into contact with people and ideas I would never have even known existed let alone been able to involve myself with.

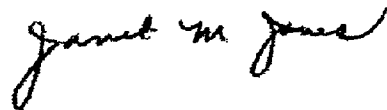
5. (and finally), Community Access has provided a place for our two adolescent children to "try out" careers in communications and broadcasting. We could certainly not have afforded the classes, the equipment and the supervision that CAC gives to our children and we are enormously grateful for the resource. As a result of their involvement our oldest child is finishing University with a Communications and Film Making major and our younger is finishing H.S. with selected courses in Radio and TV. With a group of other interested H.S. students, he produces a live call-in show for teenagers broadcast weekly on the Community Access Channels.

Already, 99% of the media belongs to the "professionals" -- the commercial broadcasters (and I AM including Public Broadcasting in this per-centage as it is obvious that all of its programming is likewise underwritten by commercial interests). I am absolutely certain that commercial providers have NO INTEREST in including me in their program development and planning and that my personal, parochial interests will be overlooked.

Our local Direct Broadcast Satellite provider (Community Access Center of Kalamazoo, MI) is exceptional. Other small communities should be encouraged to aspire to a higher standard of direct community involvement, not encouraged to limit citizen access even more than it is. Government should be encouraging democracy (messy as it is) instead of limiting free speech.

Please vote AGAINST giving Direct Broadcast Satellite providers the alternative of choosing their own programmers. Hold them to the higher standard of true public interest programming.

Sincerely,



Janet M. Jones

copy: Joan Burke, Executive Director, Community Access Center